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Update on Human Development Report consultations

1. In January 2003, during its 57th session, the General Assembly adopted resolution A/RES/57/264, in which it invited the Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA to include in its annual work plan as from 2003 a separate agenda item on the *Human Development Report* (HDR). The aim of the resolution was to improve the consultation process with Member States regarding the HDR so as to enhance its quality and accuracy without compromising its editorial independence.

2. In line with that resolution, the actions undertaken to improve the quality of consultations with Member States, and with the community of human development practitioners at large, are detailed below. The year 2008 is an exceptional one for the HDR and the Human Development Report Office (HDRO) in two respects. First, given the importance of the topic of climate change, the HDR 2007 was made to cover also for 2008. That decision was taken to allow for a more sustained follow-up to the messages and policy implications presented in the climate change report. Second, as of 31 December, the Director of HDRO ceased his functions. Those two facts affected the content and frequency of the informal consultations, since the research and writing process of the HDR 2009 started later than usual.

3. The present narrative describes the content of consultations held during the transition period, which include the first informal consultation led by the outgoing Director; a consultation on the selection of the theme of the HDR 2009 and plans for the elaboration of the HDR 2010; and a thematic consultation on statistics.

4. During the first informal consultation, the outgoing Director shared with the Executive Board a brief reflection of the work that HDRO had undertaken during his three-year tenure. He pointed out that the office had sought to strengthen its consultation process with the Executive Board and had implemented a variety of suggestions made by delegations, such as considering inputs by governments on potential themes for upcoming years,

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and holding consultations earlier during the selection of the theme of the report and also in the writing process. The Director referred to the decision taken two years earlier to strengthen the statistical work, particularly in the areas of capacity development and accounting for discrepancies between national and international data. He reported on HDRO efforts to bolster its communication and outreach capacity. Finally, he mentioned the issuance of a publication on the state of human development, expected in the summer of 2008.

5. Following the usual practice, HDRO held a special network consultation in 2008 to choose the theme for the HDR 2009. That discussion afforded the opportunity to announce that the HDR 2010 would be devoted to revisiting the HDR approach 20 years after the first HDR in 1990. The discussion, launched by the Acting Director of HDRO, was hosted over the course of a month and a half (beginning of February to mid-March) on the UNDP resident representatives network and the Human Development Report network (HDRNet). During 2007, representatives of several Member States had expressed their willingness to participate in the network discussion to choose the theme of the HDR. Their names were added to the HDRNet. Further, during the annual session 2007 of the Executive Board HDRO was requested to provide a note to guide delegates willing to subscribe to the HDR networks. This was done to allow delegates to follow closely the network discussion on the theme selection and cast their votes. Again in 2008, the network discussion featured interesting contributions and ample material to support the decision on the final selection of the theme of the HDR 2009.

6. In that context, the aim of the second informal consultation was to present Board members with the three themes that had been suggested for HDR 2009. Delegates commented extensively on the various themes, but requested HDRO to keep the network discussion open for longer period of time to allow the delegations the possibility of voting. The idea of devoting HDR 2010 to revisiting the human development approach was well received.

7. Traditionally, the topic of one of the informal consultations on the HDR has been the statistical work for the report. The third informal consultation of 2008 focused on the plan to publish a short report, *The State of Human Development*, on income and gender inequalities. The publication would also include the latest Human Development Index (HDI). One of the changes on the HDI in 2008 is the use of new World Bank data on relative prices ('purchasing power parities'). The data is required to express one of the three components of the HDI – country income per capita – on a comparative basis. Data on relative price levels was last collected in the mid-1990s. Consequently, the new data used to construct the HDI will reflect major revisions in price levels for some countries and regions. The proposed state of human development publication would explain the reasons behind those revisions and their impact on the HDI. Other human development indicators normally published in the global HDR will be updated in 2008 and released on the HDRO website to provide data users with the latest statistics and indicators during the year.

8. At the time of writing the present annual account on the informal consultations on the HDR, the process of research and writing of the

HDR 2009 had not yet started. Consequently, an additional agenda item is included for the third informal consultation, to request the Executive Board to host four informal consultations on the HDR instead of five as in previous years. It is expected that the fourth and last consultation will be held at the end of May, to announce the final selection of the theme of HDR 2009 and to provide an update on the recruitment of the new HDRO Director.

9. The consultations have been well attended by Executive Board members and observers. Several delegates thanked HDRO for organizing the consultations, characterizing them as "very useful". Delegates commended the work undertaken by HDRO and particularly appreciated the discussion on the selection of the theme for HDR 2009, which added transparency to the elaboration process without compromising the editorial independence of the report. Indeed, delegates expressed strong support for the editorial independence of the report throughout the consultation process.

10. HDRO is committed to preparing the HDR in a neutral, transparent manner, in full and effective consultation with Member States, and paying due regard to the use of resources and the impartial nature of the report.